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Designing Your Company Logo

A
Zoho
Academy
Workbook

- Know why logos matter
- Determine your target market
- Define your brand's personality
- Research the competition
- Learn shape and color psychology
- Choose a typeface

Logos: Why They Matter

Target. Apple. Nike. Starbucks. What comes to mind when you read each of these company names? Our guess is that a red bullseye, an apple with a bite taken out of it, a swoosh, and a green mermaid are among the first images evoked.

Each of these brands is now so prominent that the moment we see their logos, we know whose “signature” we’re seeing, what they stand for, and how we feel about them. But they all started *some-where*, with the hope that their logo would eventually prompt that recall.

Your logo *is* your signature, your company’s face, and often your prospects’ first impression of your business. As one element of your brand identity, it’s the most important visual asset you’ve got... and a compelling logo is crucial in this modern world of competing distractions and saturated brand messaging. (It’s been estimated that the average American is exposed to more than 5,000 brands *a day*.) In order to be seen in all that clutter, you’ve got to visually differentiate yourself.



Of course, there's a lot to consider when it comes to encapsulating your brand in a single emblem—one that captures your company's tone and essence, represents what you stand for, and conveys the unique value you bring to your industry (not to mention evokes a desired emotion in your prospects and customers). It requires a strategy that attends to the significance and psychology of each discrete element, while perceiving their place in the single message you've boiled your business down to. That's why we suggest you use a designer at some point in the process.

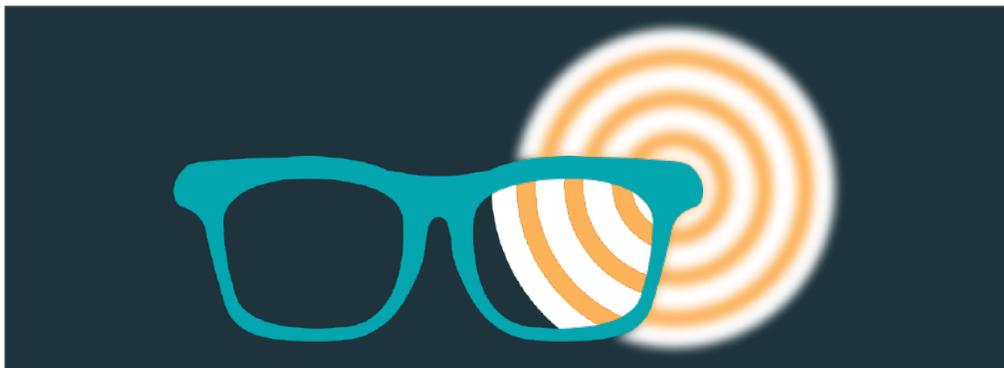
Your logo will be with you for as long as your business exists; and making that investment in a professional early on may make all the difference in your market's long-term perception of you.

But deciding to hire a designer doesn't mean it isn't important to understand the design process. The more familiar you are with the basics of logo design, the better able you'll be to make the right decisions—regardless of whether you're at the helm of the project or not. So even if you've got a designer in mind, this workbook will prepare you for that working relationship: by asking the questions any good designer will ask, and helping you draft logos that are both creative and appropriate to your brand. These drafts should give any designer a great starting point.

Clarify Your Target Market

Why start with your **target market**? Because this is the group your logo will ultimately have to demonstrate empathy for and appeal to. It's important to keep in mind from the beginning that the final decisions about your logo won't ultimately be based on personal preference. They'll be a matter of appropriateness and relevance to your target market.

Knowing your customer demographics and psychographics will help you answer some basic questions early on. For instance, if your demographic is pre-teens, you'll probably want vibrant colors in a playful logo. If your demographic is seniors, you'll want especially legible typography in a logo whose elements conjure trust. If your demographic is middle-aged outdoor adventurers, you'll want your logo to evoke ruggedness, strength, stamina, and the natural world. And so on.



The point is to be clear about the people who will be intimately interacting with your brand. The more clarity you have on this, the more clarity you'll have around what your design might include... as well as what it definitely should *not* include.

Exercise: Describe Your Target Market

The type of person who *most* benefits from my product or service struggles with _____

This person is _____ years old, (male/female/nonbinary), (married/single), does _____ for work, and makes an annual salary of _____ . Their educational background is _____

The things about themselves they're most proud of are _____

For my target market, "success" looks like _____

My most loyal customers appreciate my business because we share these values: _____

If I had to choose *one* message to send my target audience, it would be _____

Define Your Brand's Personality

Now it's time to **think about yourself**. If you choose to work with a designer, these are the kinds of questions they'll ask; so you might as well get them down on paper *now*:

- **What set of circumstances caused us to start this business? What's our origin story? What's the story behind our company's name?**
- **What five things do we most value? What are our beliefs about the world? About our industry? About *people*?**
- **How do we do what we do better than our competition? What makes our product or service unique? What are the most distinctive features and benefits of our offering... and why do they matter to our customers?**
- **What are our goals and objectives? What drives us?**
- **If our company was a person, what would it be like to spend the day with them? What adjectives would we use to describe their personality?**

Think of this exercise as a process of self-discovery—as though you were meeting your business for the first time.



Exercise: Discover Language and Images for Your Brand

Gather your employees, interview your team members, and have family members and friends work through these exercises with you. The more brainstorming, the better!

The words that immediately come to mind when I think about my brand are: _____

When I open Thesaurus.com and input those words into the search feature, the most compelling (and honest-to-my-brand) results are:

When I open Google's image search and input those words into the search feature, the most compelling (and honest-to-my-brand) images are: _____

The strongest one-sentence mission statement I can create from these words is: _____

The first images that come to mind when I re-read that mission statement are: _____

Research Your Competitors

You should be researching your competitors when it comes to every aspect of your business... and your logo is no exception. What styles have your competitors chosen? What colors do they employ? What visual metaphors, symbols, or icons do they use? Is there an overarching set of patterns you notice? If there are commonalities, avoid them in your own design. If your competitors' logos are all modern, ask yourself why... and if you can discern no good reason, consider a more traditional look for yours. You want to occupy a unique place in your specific market... and if your customers can't tell your logo apart from anyone else's, that may mean lost business for you.

**So strive for both
different and better.**

While you're doing this research, do pay attention to what logo elements you're drawn to. See if you can articulate what you like and don't like about each logo you see. Shape? Harmony? Typography? If your competitors' customers have made comments about their logos, take note of these. Knowing what's working (or failing) from the customers' point of view will be invaluable.

Exercise: Scope out Your Competitors

My biggest competitor is _____

Their logo looks like _____

What I'm drawn to in their logo is _____

What I don't like about their logo is _____

My second biggest competitor is _____

Their logo looks like _____

What I'm drawn to in their logo is _____

What I don't like about their logo is _____

My third biggest competitor is _____

Their logo looks like _____

What I'm drawn to in their logo is _____

What I don't like about their logo is _____

Choose Your Logo Type

As you're designing your logo, try experimenting with these types:

1. **Logotypes (wordmarks).** With logotypes, the name of the business *is* the logo. Think *Google*, *FedEx*, *Coca-Cola*, and *Yahoo!*
2. **Monogram logos (lettermarks).** These are built around the company's initials. Think *IBM*, *CNN*, *Uber*, or *H&M*.
3. **Combination marks.** Combination marks combine an image with text. They're popular options because they're more likely to be unique, and they offer flexibility across platforms. Think *Burger King*, *AT&T*, *Taco Bell*, and *Adidas*.
4. **Symbols or icons.** These logos dispense with words altogether and instead use an image that *represents* the word. Think *Apple*, *Shell*, *Twitter*, and *Target*.
5. **Abstract logos.** Abstract logos don't have any inherent meaning in and of themselves; they're forms that take on meaning as the brand becomes established. Think *Audi*, *Nike*, *Pepsi*, and *BP*.
6. **Emblems.** An emblem is a kind of combination mark, but it's presented as a seal or crest. Think *Starbucks* and *Harley Davidson*. These logo types tend to be more visually complex.
7. **Mascots.** Think *KFC*, Tony the Tiger, and the logos of many professional sports teams.

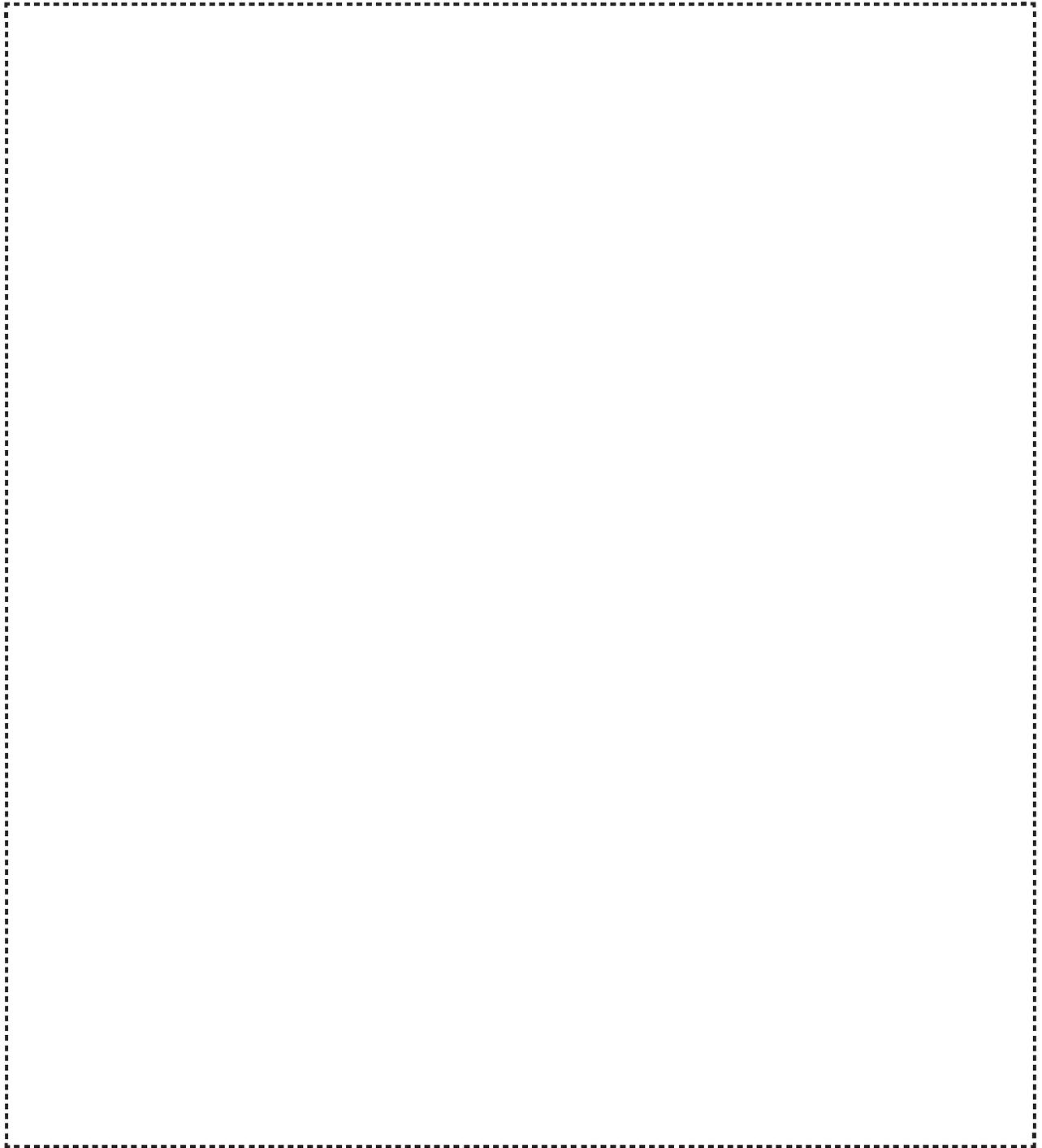
If your business isn't a household name and your goal is to build name recognition, include your company's name in your logo, regardless of which type you choose.

Start Sketching

We know: We've recommended you use a designer; but taking some time to do this on your own may confirm some ideas about what you want. Here are some suggestions:

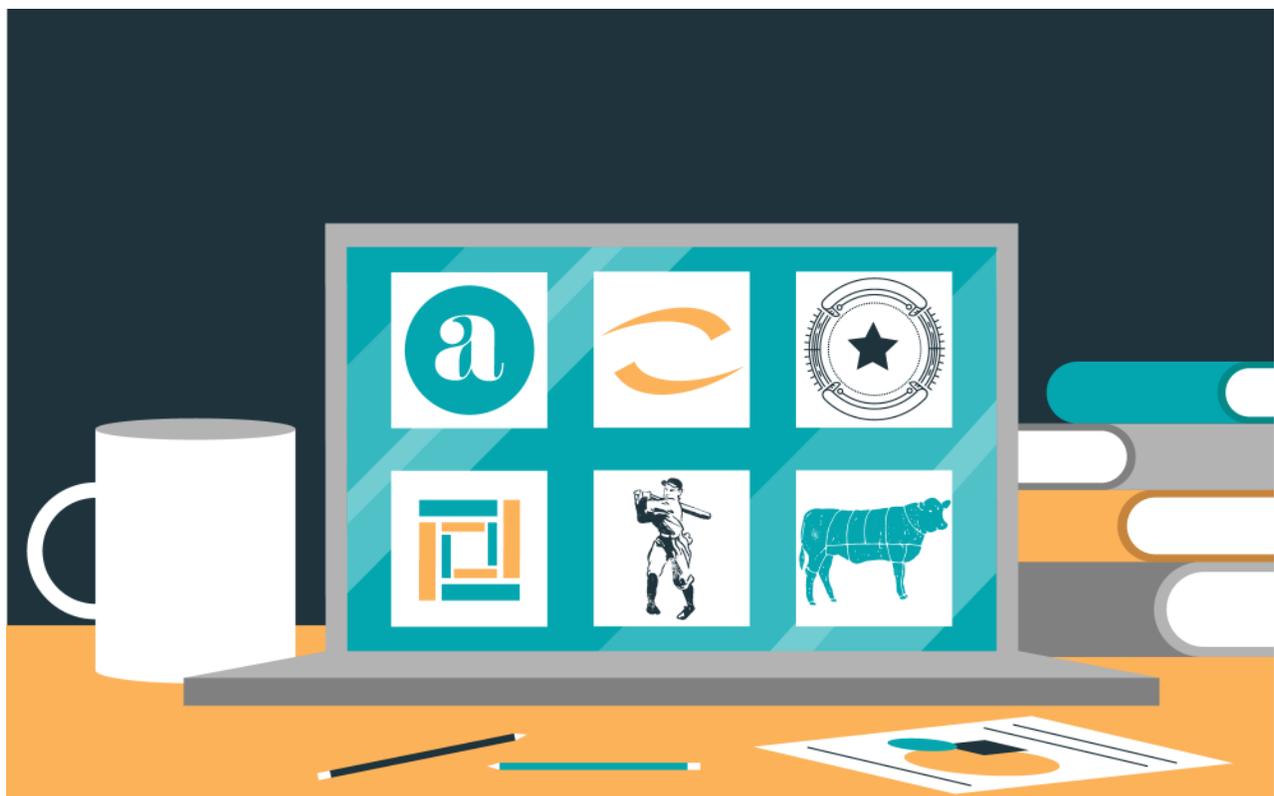
- 1. Use a pencil and paper.** Sketching by hand is the quickest way to get ideas out of your head to gauge how they look in two dimensions. It also has an important psychological dimension: You'll know it's not the "final" piece, so you'll allow yourself to be messy, more creative, and willing to humor your wilder ideas. Our perfectionist tendencies kick in on screen; we go into small-detail mode and forget the big picture.
- 2. Stick with black-and-white.** Leaving color out in the initial phases will ensure your attention is trained on the essential aspects of the logo (shape, font, positive and negative space), rather than on something that's easy to change. You'll end up using black-and-white versions of your logo, anyhow (in print advertisements, for example), so you might as well see how it looks now. A logo that looks good in black and white will *also* look good in color; but the same can't always be said in reverse.
- 3. Don't erase or discard anything.** Allow every concept you experiment with to evolve on its own; follow through on every sketch if you can. Details you don't initially like may spark new ideas for the next iteration. What's more, when you make yourself draw a bad idea, you clear your mind of clutter. And at the end of this process, don't discard the logos you don't like! They may offer you (or your designer) something of value later on.

Exercise: Initial Sketching



Get Inspired

If you're feeling stuck during the sketching phase, forcing yourself to sit there and stare at that blank piece of paper may not be your most valuable strategy. Get on Pinterest and see what you find there. Start a collection of images that inspire you. Go to your local museum or art gallery. Look at books on pop culture, graphic design, or art history. Return to your favorite novel and pay attention to literary imagery... or simply take a walk downtown and take in the details of the logos you see on the storefronts there. Some of your best ideas might come from bringing two disparate images or experiences together from these "imaginative journeys."



Consider Shape and Color Psychology

Our brains are hardwired to process shapes and colors before words; so these are elements worth paying attention to. There's plenty of research out there about shape and color psychology, and your designer should be versed in it. Here's a quick list of basic shapes and colors and what they subconsciously communicate:

- **Circles and ovals:** balance, security, trust, unity, integrity, harmony. Interlocking circles represent community (think of the Olympics' logo).
- **Squares and rectangles:** capability, honesty, rationality, professionalism. Shapes with straight lines tend to symbolize structure and order, and are often described as "masculine."
- **Triangles:** strength, stability, power, purpose direction
- **Red:** passion, energy, excitement, boldness, confidence, danger
- **Yellow:** optimism, friendliness, happiness, freshness
- **Blue:** trust, reliability, loyalty, authority, confidence, tranquility
- **Green:** growth, life, nature
- **Purple:** royalty, luxury, wealth, wisdom, spirituality
- **Gray:** maturity, timelessness, practicality, tradition
- **Brown:** stability, ruggedness, history (think vintage)
- **Black:** power, credibility, intellect, modernity
- **White:** simplicity, clarity, neutrality, purity

REMEMBER: ▼

The more colors in your logo, the costlier printing will be. And be sure to test your logo on backgrounds of different colors: It won't always be printed on the same color canvas you designed it on.

Consider Typography

Take a look again at how you described your brand on page 6. Whether you wrote “quirky”, “cool”, “sophisticated”, “bold”, or any other adjective, there’s a font out there (or one ready to be made) for you:

Serif fonts convey luxury, dignity, tradition, reliability, seriousness, stylishness, and elegance (think *Gap*).

Sans serif fonts are more modern and clean-looking (think *eBay*), though they are versatile in what they can communicate. Sans serif fonts are more legible in small sizes.

Script fonts give the impression of being handwritten (think *Coca-Cola*). They can convey everything from elegance, to creativity, to personality, to intimacy.

Decorative fonts are highly stylized and eye-catching (think *Disney*). They can communicate just about anything... but above all, they communicate uniqueness and singularity.

Above all, prioritize legibility and appropriateness to your brand identity.



Exercise: Shape, Color, Typography

If my business were a shape, it would be a _____
because that shape symbolizes _____

If my business were a color, it would be _____
because that color evokes _____

Based on my company's character, I should choose a font that conveys _____

Based on my company's character, my font weight should be (bold / normal / light) because _____

Based on what I want my prospects to think about my business, my lettering should be (condensed / expanded) and (in all caps / lowercase), because _____

Draw the kind of typeface that might best suit your business here:



The Characteristics of a Good Logo (Checklist)

- It's appropriate.** Your logo should appeal to—and align with—*your* target audience. It should also reflect the essence of your company. Note this does *not* mean that your logo needs to show what your company does (Honda's logo isn't a car, after all; Adidas' logo isn't a shoe).
- It's memorable.** Maybe this means there's a cleverness to the design (think of the FedEx logo with that arrow made of whitespace). Maybe this means it's willing to do something far different than your competitors' logos. Your logo will only be as memorable as it is unique.
- It's simple.** A logo isn't supposed to say *everything* about your business. A complex logo will be difficult to process, and ultimately, less memorable. What's more, it won't be scalable. There shouldn't be a single element of your logo that can't be taken out without marring the message.
- It's scalable and versatile.** Your logo will sometimes be displayed in black-and-white (so steer clear of gradients), and may be printed on pens, sewn into clothing, displayed on billboards, or presented as an app icon. It should present well in *every* scenario you can imagine: small and large, grayscale, and on any color background.
- It's timeless.** You'll want your logo to survive as long as your business does. This is why it's important not to go with passing trends when designing it—you'll only date your logo quickly, and *appear* out-of-date to your prospects. Pay attention to changing trends so you know what to avoid. Ask yourself: will this design still be effective 20 years from now?

The Design Phase

Ultimately, you'll need to have your logo digitized; and while you *can* do this yourself in a graphic design program, we recommend hiring a professional with a background in logo design. A trained designer will not only ask the right questions and do the right research; they'll also understand how your logo needs to scale across different marketing and media channels. You can work directly with a freelance designer, through a design agency, or use a design contest site that will crowdsource your logo.

Choose your designer based on these criteria:

- **Experience (the breadth of their portfolio)**
- **The *strength* of their portfolio**
- **Awards won and work published**
- **Testimonials and affiliations**
- **Process, price, and timeframe**
- **Communication and professionalism**

If your designer will be doing the entire design, from brainstorming and iteration on, expect a process that begins with a design brief (written up after an interview in which the designer will ask some of the questions we included at the beginning of this workbook), and include a few rounds of feedback. You should receive the final logo as a vector graphic. Vector graphics are the ultimate in both flexibility and scalability.

Final Tips

We just mentioned that there will be a few rounds of feedback scheduled into the design process. Include a focus group in these rounds! Inviting members of your target audience to give feedback or vote for their favorite design means keeping the most important party at the forefront of this decision. You won't want your final design choice to be badly received by your audience.

Include your logo in your brand style guide (your designer should help with this). It will codify correct and incorrect usage of your logo to ensure you stay consistent in your presentation.

Register and trademark your logo with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website. This ensures other companies won't use it.

Use your logo wherever you can: business cards, product packaging, letterhead, your business's front door, your social media accounts... even your contracts. Where *you* go, your logo goes.

Remember that the success of your business ultimately determines the success of your logo. No matter *how* beautiful your finished product is, it will only become iconic if your company fulfills its potential. So design a great logo, yes... but then offer a fantastic product or service.

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